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In Defence of our Secret Service

DONALD McLACHLAN says that in criticisms over Philby we should beware of falling for Communist propaganda

IT is a sad week for Britain in which the public is asked to believe—by a "quality" newspaper—that Kim Philby was in the running for the top job in the Secret Service and the Foreign Secretary is asked to explain — by the B.B.C.s most "quality" programme—to defend his use of alcohol.

Was it ever really on the cards, one may ask, that Mr. George Brown would come into the Foreign Office and find in charge of one of his most difficult and important departments a man whose drinking habits were notorious and who had been a Soviet agent since the early 'thirties? The answer is certainly No; but only the *Daily Sketch*, of all the newspapers on the Philby trail last Monday, took the trouble to ask the one man likely to know the answer.

Major-General Sir Stewart Menzies, head of Philby's service from 1939 to 1951, said, "He would never have been head of MI6." Why? Because "he was never very big in the organisation" and, Sir Stewart might have added, this has always been a job for men from the Services. It may suit Philby to let the Russians think that he had such exalted prospects; but I should be surprised if they believed him.

It will fall to Mr. Brown to answer questions in the House provoked by the revival of interest in the Philby affair and its connections with the defection of Burgess and Maclean. It will doubtless be pointed out by the Opposition that this operation in treachery was at its height under the Labour Government of 1945-51; that Burgess was for two years assistant private secretary to the late Hector McNeil when Minister of State, Foreign Office; that, however inexplicable Mr. Macmillan's public clearance of Philby may now seem, this is not an affair that can be pinned singly on the Tories. This is a bi-partisan liability.

One begins to feel a little sorry for Mr. Brown; indeed, there were moments during his television performance the other night when I felt very sorry for him as a victim of the Cudlipp-Day squeeze. Ministers do not normally expect the B.B.C. to put to them questions formulated by the *Daily Mirror*.

Then, however, I recalled how Mr. Brown himself five years ago hounded Mr. Galbraith, then Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, into resigning, with allegations concerning the Vassall case; how the *Sunday Pictorial* bought Vassall's letters and how on Nov. 5, 1962, Mr. Brown alleged in the House of Commons that these "indicated a degree of Ministerial responsibility which goes far beyond the ordinary business of a Minister in charge."

I recalled, too, how the Radcliffe Tribunal of Inquiry found that the letters were "entirely innocuous" and their contents "never more than trivial and always correct." Has Mr. Brown no memory, no conscience, when he asks to be left alone?

The digression may seem irrelevant. It is not, because the revival of the Philby affair has provoked a fresh wave of anti-gentleman, down-with-the-old-boy-ring, let's-expose-the-Establishment fervour, of which the Labour party has in the past been such a beneficiary. The implication is that the Secret Service is a closed circle which should be "exposed"; that it is probably decadent and inefficient; that it should be "cleaned up" and released from its "class loyalties."

This is, of course, one of the favourite lines of Communist propaganda, although many people do not know that. It showed itself during the Fuchs case, during the whole Blake affair and most conspicuously during the Burgess and Maclean episode. It inspired in the Press much unfair and ignorant comment.

How, one may ask, is a secret service to be defended against the kind of misinformation one finds in the book by Lonsdale, the Russian spy who was sent back in exchange for Wynne, in Philby's own alleged statements and in other material coming from Soviet or Soviet-inspired sources? Silence is the only possible answer: the same answer as one would expect if one attempted to expose either the T.U.C. or the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, or the Confederation of British Industry.

The service is not one that can be examined by work study and management experts; or by select committee of the House; or even by Privy Councillors. It is the sole responsibility of the busy Prime Minister and the even busier Foreign Secretary. But there are lines of defence which might be used with more skill than has so far been shown.

A secret body must be a co-opted one; it cannot be chosen by competitive examination. Its members must be highly educated, loyal, intelligent, ruthless, secretive and ready to be lonely. The field is at once greatly restricted; it must, in fact, be an old-boy net, like its Soviet, French and American counterparts. If it has shown a partiality for gentlemen, that is on a par with the Soviet preference for good party members.

It might, too, be pointed out how wartime expansion loosened the safeguards: Blake got in via naval intelligence, when interpreters in Germany were short. Peacetime contraction overlooked Philby.

It should also be pointed out that the American record of defections, traitors and long-undetected spies is no less disturbing than our own. Even Lonsdale and the Krogers—the most important Soviet spies detected here—escaped from the United States.

Here is the American list, for anyone who has forgotten: Hiss, Soble, Soblen, Gold, the Rosenbergs, Slack, Greenglass, Brothman, Moskowitz, Abel, Coplon, Haynahen, Scarbeck (the Warsaw diplomat), Bucar, Cascio, Verber, Dorey, Sobell, Boeckenhaupt. To which should be added the post-graduate cypher experts Martin and Mitchell who fled to Russia via Cuba rather in the way that Burgess and Maclean left via France—but in less of a hurry.

It is just not fair—and I suspect it is not true—to say whenever Philby's or any other case is mentioned that the United States will be

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"even more suspicious" of our security methods.

We should also be particularly suspicious of another line that reappears on these occasions: it is that the intelligentsia of the 'thirties, disillusioned by unemployment and appeasement, naturally saw nothing wrong in serving Stalin's Russia; Philby and others like him were the ideological rebels of their day, and should therefore be not without honour.

I leave this to the judgment of the scores of thousands of men and women, of the same degree of intelligence and with varying political beliefs, who worked then—and work now—in complete loyalty to their country and their colleagues at tasks of the greatest secrecy. Those who harp on the Philby story as if it were the beginning and end of British Intelligence run the risk of undermining that loyalty by advertising a bogus set of values.

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